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BAGHDAD FOR POL, ECON, NCT

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SUBJECT: BANNED IN TURKEY, POLITICAL PARTY OPENS ERBIL OFFICE ON  
KRG'S TAB

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CLASSIFIED BY: RSDEAN, Acting Regional Coordinator, REO Kirkuk,  
DoS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C/NOFORN) SUMMARY: The Socialist Party of Kurdistan recently opened a party office in the Kurdistan Region capital of Erbil, Iraq. Its representative Nureddin Agiri said Erbil's Kurdistan Regional Government was subsidizing the SPK's Erbil office. Agiri admitted his under-financed party was banned in Turkey, but said it rejected violence and was pushing for the establishment of Kurdish provinces in Turkey, Syria and Iran. Agiri said SPK members supported the U.S. presence in the area and were involved in the recent Newroz demonstrations in Turkey.  
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C/NOFORN) Nureddin Agiri, Representative to Iraq from the Socialist Party of Kurdistan (SPK) in Turkey, met April 6 with IPAO in Erbil. The SPK was founded in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in Turkey, but is prohibited by Turkish law. The SPK recently established an office in the Kurdish province of Erbil, Iraq, to promote their regional cause. Agiri said that Erbil's Kurdistan Regional Government (dominated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party) supported their organization by providing an office and paying their rent. He said he had a staff of six.

#### Party Ideology

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¶3. (C) Agiri said the SPK was created to push for the "democratic rights of Kurds" and create a Kurdish province within Turkey, similar to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. According to Agiri, Kurds were until 2002 referred to as "Mountain Turks" in Turkey and were not allowed to claim their ethnic heritage as anything other than Turkish.

¶4. (C/NOFORN) Agiri said that the SPK sought to create Kurdish provinces similar to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq for Syria, Turkey and Iran. He said this was to ensure democratic and human rights for the Kurdish people while living among people of other ethnicities. He said that the "Socialist" part of the "SPK" name could be more accurately replaced with "Democratic" to reflect their actual goals. Agiri said the SPK had worked within the democratic process to elect two mayors in Turkey; however, he described the candidates as independents with an allegiance to the party.

No Methodological Connection to the PKK

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15. (C) The SPK shares some ideology with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), but Agiri said it had no other connection. Agiri stated emphatically that the SPK condoned neither terrorism nor violence, and that as long as the PKK continued to embrace those methods, there could be no relationship between the two parties.

He charged that the Turkish government had created the PKK to get Kurds to fight other Kurds. He said that jailed PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan had told a publication that for four years the Turkish government had given the PKK arms to fight other Kurds, adding "They used me, and I used them too." Agiri said that, if the PKK gave up its arms and accepted democracy, then the two groups could get closer.

#### Fear of Imprisonment

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16. (C) Agiri said that, if Turkey knew of the political nature of his travel to Iraq, he would face imprisonment. In 2002 he was arrested and sentenced to one year in jail and fined 1 million Turkish lira. One month into his sentence, the Turkish law he was charged under was changed because of Turkey's bid to join the European Union. He said the law forbade Kurds from claiming their ethnicity. Today, that law no longer existed and Kurds had the political right to claim their ethnicity. However, he said, Turkish criminal law prohibited Kurdish organizations and political parties; the maximum sentence was 12 years. Agiri said that he was imprisoned for saying in the press that Kurds wanted "the democratic process" because none of the four countries with large Kurdish populations were taking care of them.

#### Membership and Finances

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17. (C/NOFORN) Agiri said that many of the SPK's members now living outside Turkey were prohibited from returning. The

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Secretary General of the party, Masud Taq, lived between his

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home in Germany and Erbil. The second in command, Kormal Burka, was a writer and poet living in Sweden. The membership of the party is kept a secret, though he estimated there were about 2,000, most of who still live in Turkey. He said that the membership came from all social classes, including teachers and officials, and that sometimes they recruited members based on education or occupation. He said they were very afraid of being infiltrated by Turkish intelligence, as there were Kurds who were willing to work against them.

18. (C/NOFORN) The party was supported financially by its membership, much of which came from Europe. Beyond salaries, transportation for officers, and leasing office space, he was unable to identify other specific programs or expenses. He said that the party membership was poor and donations were taken voluntarily. One reason they were not very active was because they lacked funding.

#### Cooperation with Legitimate Turkish Parties

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19. (C/NOFORN) Agiri said that the SPK coordinated with legally registered Kurd-dominated parties in Turkey, including the Rights and Freedoms Party (RFP). He said the RFP was founded by Abdulmelik Firat, the grandson of Shaykh Sayid, the leader of the Kurdish revolt in Turkey executed in 1925. The RFP was a legitimate party, but existed to talk about Kurdish problems legally. Both Turks and Kurds were members of the RFP and approached the issues by seeking human rights for all ethnicities. He said that the SPK was heavily involved with demonstrations in Turkey over the Newroz holiday in March. Until 1997, celebrating Newroz was illegal in Turkey because it was specific to one ethnic group. Now, Newroz is celebrated as

a holiday for all Turks, but the Kurds used it as an opportunity to demonstrate for more democratic rights.

#### SPK's Support for U.S. Policy in Region

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¶10. (C) Agiri said the SPK supported the U.S. presence in Iraq and felt it benefited the whole of the Middle East. America's global dominance in politics and economics brought positive change to the region and its old systems of government. He said that was the first time the SPK had ever contacted a U.S. official and sought a relationship.

¶11. (C) Agiri said Kurds as a whole had benefited from the U.S. presence in Iraq because it brought global attention to their cause. He said all Kurds were paying particular attention to Iraq's Kurdistan Region, as it gave them hope. He said that, even though Turkey had democracy, it did not apply it to the Kurds, and still treated them the same way others did in the rest of the Middle East.

Comment:

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¶12. (C/NOFORN) Agiri appears to be a sincere proponent of the SPK's cause and stressed their commitment to non-violent means to achieve democracy for the Kurds in Turkey. He appeared to be thoughtful and frank during the meeting, with realistic expectations of what the U.S. could do for the SPK. Given Iraq's and the KRG's willingness to allow the PKK-affiliated Kurdistan Democratic Solutions Party to operate in the Kurdistan Region, it is not surprising the KRG is willing modestly to bankroll the SPK, particularly given its at least ostensibly democratic program.

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